



BUILDING CHARACTER

FOUR WEEK SERIES
VINEYARD YOUTH CURRICULUM

vineyardyouth

BUILDING CHARACTER

WELCOME!

to Vineyard Youth Curriculum

Hello, friends. What you hold in your hands is the product of lots of people, lots of prayer, and lots of purpose. As youth leaders in the Vineyard movement, we believe that the work we do with students will have much influence on what the movement will look like over the next ten to twenty years.

We set out to design a curriculum that communicates and reinforces the biblical and kingdom values of the Vineyard while inviting students to embrace the reality that they are part of something bigger than themselves.

Understanding the diversity within the Vineyard movement, we purposely designed curriculum that can be utilized by groups of differing sizes led by either paid or volunteer leaders in any geographical setting or location. Easy, right? We believe we accomplish this by offering a buffet of activities that allow you - the in-the-trenches leader to choose what works for you and your group. We're pretty sure no one will use all of the material proposed, but we're confident some of it will be a good fit for your group.

Each Lesson Will Include:

- Experiential, hands-on activities that reflect a variety of learning styles.
- Large group questions to frame a conversation (I.E., not a lecture).
- Application suggestions to live and reveal the kingdom of God.
- Small group questions.
- Times for you as the leader to tune into what God is doing in you and your students' lives.
- Times for students to hear from God for themselves.

This curriculum is written by youth leaders for youth leaders. If you would like to join the team and contribute your voice to the conversation, we would love to hear from you.

You may not hear this enough, but thank you for what you do. It's important, it's needed, and it's laying the foundation for a new generation of leaders to continue the good things God has already done in the Vineyard movement. Keep up the good work!

Why This Topic?

Discipleship begins on the inside. This is why it is so important for us to focus on character. Character lays the foundation for much of what God wants to do through us in our lives. If we run ahead of our character, only focusing on calling and ministry, we will eventually outrun our character and fall. Our emphasis in this curriculum is establishing some values of building character in young people's lives that will last a lifetime.

Helpful Reminders For You, the Youth Leader

In working with this curriculum there are a few ideas we'd like to keep in mind:

Plug in your stories wherever you can. These are bare bones here, you add the meat!

Experiential learning lasts. We've tried to make this as experiential as possible, rather than just providing head knowledge. We encourage you the leader to try it out. Take some risks!

Humor is key. It's hard for us to artificially add this from a distance, but we encourage you to find all chances you can to connect through humor!

Context matters. We don't know what's going on in your group right now, but you do. We encourage you to pray/think about how this message applies to the new ones in your group, the veterans, and the seekers! How does this tie into the message of salvation through Jesus?

These Lessons Are on Video!

These notes are meant to be a companion to the videos. There is deeper teaching on the video, the notes here are more of an overview of the lesson. Go to vineyardyouthusa.com/resources to view the video teaching for this series. Each lesson is taught by Thomas McKellick, and you can follow along with the written version.

WHAT MAKES A SUCCESSFUL LEADER?

BIG IDEA

CHARACTER IS THE FOUNDATION OF SUCCESSFUL LEADERSHIP.

YOUTH LEADER SOUL CARE

Take some time to reflect on the grace God has extended to you in your life. Think about the ways you have grown in your character. How have you let Jesus transform you? Thank him for giving you grace to change and grow. This lesson covers the story of Samson. It is kind of a strange ending. Take some time to read through it and ask the Lord what he is speaking to you. My intention for using the life of Samson in this material is to emphasize that God has grace to use broken people, but your gifting will never outweigh your character.

STARTER

Game: Celebrity Salad Bowl

Give everyone in your group three small pieces of paper. Have them each write down a person, a place, and a thing. Then fold them and put them all into a bowl. Break into two teams. Each team gets 30 seconds for one of their people to pull papers from the bowl and try to get their teammates to guess it by using only words. Obviously they can't use the word on the paper! If you want to make the game last longer, once you get through all the papers, put them back in the bowl and use them for charades: no talking—just actions!

LESSON

Before you get into the lesson, start with a short discussion on successful leadership. Ask the question: "What makes a leader successful?" You will get a variety of answers. If you have time, share a few popular methods that the world offers in terms of what makes a person successful. Examples can include manipulation, family background/inheritance, and fear/intimidation.

The most popular example of what people look for in successful leadership is gifting. Even in the church we often find ourselves more attracted to someone's gifting and abilities before we notice their character. A biblical example of this is found in the story of Samson.

Verses: Read Judges 13: 1–5, and Judges 14:1–8

Samson is an incredibly gifted guy. He's physically impressive: he has incredible strength, he's attractive, and he obviously has an anointing. Have you ever been around someone like that? What happens when you're with somebody who

usually wins? (For the leader: provide an example, such as when you have a star athlete on your team.) It feels great to win and to succeed. This is even true in churches, specifically when we think about the stage. The people who end up on the platform are generally very gifted. They're the ones that can really wow people with their spiritual gifts and by their confidence and courage. (For the leader: provide an example, such as a worship leader, or someone who prays and it's like the presence of God fills the room.)

Winning games and wowing people usually have little to do with character. This is one of the things that makes leadership so challenging. As you're about to see in the life of Samson, God sometimes allows gifting to rest on people that are going to blow themselves up and blow others up. Why does that happen? Gifting can run through somebody for a long time, but if that person's character has a weak foundation, they eventually crumble. The Bible says over and over, your sin will find you out. And usually when that happens, it's just a mess. Each one of us has probably met a victim of someone who has been wounded by another leader's faulty character, or perhaps you have experienced this personally. (If possible, provide a personal example.)

We can observe Samson's pattern of disobedience early in his life. From this passage, we see that Samson ignores the counsel of his parents and marries a Philistine wife. He kills a young lion, doesn't cleanse himself, eats honey out of the dead carcass, and keeps it quiet from his parents. What's interesting though is verse 6, which says, "The Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon him..." The Lord was still using Samson, even in the midst of his disobedience.

DISCUSS

Take some time now to discuss these questions:

- Why do you think God allows people with faulty character to continue to lead?
- Is gifting important in leadership?
- Do you miss out on God's call when you walk away from integrity?

Verses: Read Judges 16:4–6

Up to this point, Samson has continued to operate out of his own desires and successes to justify his sin. All of Judges 15 reveals his anger and rage, his vengeful spirit, and his temptation towards women. Delilah seduces him and tries to trick him into revealing the secret to his strength. He continues to lie to her until ultimately he gives in to reveal his secret. Read verses 15–22.

DISCUSS

Why do you think Samson keeps making the same mistakes, choosing his own desires over God's?

What does this story reveal about God's heart towards Samson?

Read verse 22 again.

HOLY SPIRIT/ MINISTRY TIME

Ask everyone to sit quietly and wait on the Holy Spirit. Ask God to reveal to them the areas of their hearts where they haven't been obedient. Remind them that the Lord doesn't inflict guilt or shame—that's not from God. He does, however, convict, and he leads us to repentance out of his kindness. Walk them through a prayer of repentance. They can do so in the quietness of their hearts.

APPLICATION

Take some time this week to journal. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you your character qualities. Take some time to celebrate those and ask God to breathe life into your character. Ask him to also reveal your weaknesses. Ask for grace to change and renounce your participation with anything that would get in the way of your growth in Jesus.

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

Who is someone you respect because they have good character? What is it about them that makes you think they have good character?

When you think about your character, what is one area that you think you are strong in? What is one area you could grow in?

What pressures in our culture today make it difficult to be a person of good character?

WHAT REVEALS CHARACTER?

BIG IDEA

CHARACTER IS REVEALED THROUGH TESTING.

YOUTH LEADER SOUL CARE

What areas of your life have been tested over the last few weeks? How are you navigating those challenges with Jesus? Think about a time you allowed the Holy Spirit to help you overcome a challenging moment.

STARTER

Game: Trivia

Put teams into small groups. For each trivia question you ask, select a random member from each team to answer. Once the team member thinks they have the answer, they must put their hand up to give their answer. Members of their team are not allowed to help them. Questions can be multiple choice.

LESSON

Start by asking about the trivia game: How many of you found it to be overwhelming when you were called on to answer a trivia question? How many of you felt the pressure of your teammates relying on you? What was that experience like?

Then move on to these questions: How do you do in times where you are being tested? (For example, when your patience is being tested.) How do you deal with being asked to wait for something that you feel that you need? What's something in your life that you wanted, but you had to wait for? What was that experience like? Were you tempted to take any shortcuts?

Verses: Read Exodus 32:1

The Israelites are supposed to wait and instead they decide to take matters in their own hands because of the pressure of the world. They feel that they need to start moving forward and can't wait for Moses anymore. In their eyes, this God is taking too long. So they fashion their own god that works on their terms.

When things are going well, you're not exactly aware of who you are. When

you're under pressure, you find out. Think of yourself like a toothpaste tube—you don't know what's in the tube until it gets squeezed. You don't know what kind of words reside in your heart until someone cuts you in line. The Bible says, "Out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks." Your character will reveal itself more clearly when tested. What happens in this Exodus passage is the tube gets squeezed: the Israelites are being pressed. Even though God liberated them from slavery, they still have not allowed their hearts to be liberated and wholly surrendered to God. The people are suddenly in a circumstance where they have to trust only God—not depend on anything else—and that's when we find out what's really going on in their hearts.

Verses: Read Exodus 32:2–4

Aaron, the chief priest who had seen God move mightily and miraculously on many occasions, should have shut down the requests of the people. As a leader, he should have stood firm and said, "We are not going to just partner with the culture and ignore God's commands." But instead he went along with the people. Aaron trades the presence of God for popularity with man. So the people took off their gold earrings and other jewelry and brought it before Aaron. They brought all the gold that they owned, which was the treasure from the Lord that they plundered from the Egyptians. These things were symbols of God's triumph in their lives, his victory, his goodness toward their life, and his faithfulness toward them. They ignore the holiness of God and they make an idol out of the goodness of God.

DISCUSS

- What do you do when your peers decide to ignore what God has commanded?
- How does this affect you?
- Do you give into peer pressure or do you stand firm in what God has asked you to do?
- Honestly, how would you really live if you could see God near? If you saw Jesus walk into the room, how would that change the way you live your life?

Verses: Read Exodus 33:12–16

After the incident with the Golden Calf, Moses pleads for the Lord to have mercy on his people. God is now sending them out once again. Read verse 15 again. Moses says to the Lord, “How will anyone know that you are pleased with us if you don’t go with us?”

This is so important. Moses' response reminds us that at the end of the day, all we have is the Lord's presence. Youth group is fun and it's a great place to meet new people and have good discussions. But we are doing ourselves and the world around us a disservice if we are not pointing people to the presence of God.

We stand before God and we ask him to have mercy on us. Not because he would withhold it, but because his favor is coming. You need a greater level of character to handle favor. When God speaks to your character, it's not because he's concerned with your failure; he dealt with that on the cross. He's concerned the favor he's bringing into your life will overwhelm you if you don't change your ways. Lead the group into a prayer of repentance. Join them in that prayer and model what repentance and surrender looks like.

This week set aside a few minutes one morning or evening to be with God. Ask him what he is teaching you through whatever struggle you are enduring right now. Ask him what he is inviting you to be learning, and how he is looking to shape your character.

HOLY SPIRIT/ MINISTRY TIME

APPLICATION



SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

Is it hard for you to stay strong in your convictions when the people around you aren't? What solutions can you come up with to help you in those situations?

In the lesson Thomas talked about how God wants to strengthen our character so we can hold more of his blessing. Do you feel this way? Do you think God wants to strengthen your character to bless you, or do you feel like he's critical and demanding of you?

Have you noticed that when you go through hard situations, your character is revealed? Can you give an example of a time when this happened and you were surprised how well you responded?

FAITHFUL

BIG IDEA

CHARACTER GETS SHARPENED WHEN WE CHOOSE TO BE FAITHFUL.

YOUTH LEADER SOUL CARE

Read the application section from this lesson and look for ways you can apply it to your own life.

STARTER

Game: Two Truths and a Lie

Each member of the group introduces themselves by stating two truths and one lie about themselves. The statements don't have to be intimate, life-revealing things—just simple hobbies, interests, or past experiences that make each person unique. The lie can be outrageous and wacky, or it can sound like a truth to make it harder for the other participants to guess which is which.

One at a time, each person shares their statements. The group has to guess which statements are true and which statement is the lie. You can keep score to see who correctly guesses the most lies, or just play for fun to get to know one another. Let your group decide how they want to play.

LESSON

Use only about five minutes to do a creative overview of the first three chapters of Esther, with emphasis on the main scriptures from last week. Budget your time well so this does not eat up all of your interactive discussion space.

If you chose last time to use the Bible Project Video Overview of Esther at this link <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JydNSlufRIs>, consider playing it again from the beginning, this time until 6 minutes and 11 seconds.

This will serve as a review for those in attendance last week but also as background for anyone who joins in fresh for the new lesson. Playing through 6 minutes and 11 seconds gives a slight preview of the content of this week's lesson. Remember to check all links beforehand, and always have a backup in case something goes wrong at the last minute.

Verses: Read Luke 16:10–13

Here Jesus talks about character. The first test, here in Luke 16, is whether you are faithful in little things. As a leader, this is something I look for when it comes to recruiting people to be on my team. Who does the little things? Who stays after and picks up the garbage? Who sets up chairs beforehand? Who looks for the non-flashy jobs and does those faithfully? Who shows up on time? Who engages with the discussion even when the topic may not be their favorite? The temptation is to always look for the people that are the most gifted. But Jesus said that the one who is faithful with little things can be trusted with much. You can't neglect the little things. That little bit of disobedience will spread into everything you do. It will hurt you. We need to take this stuff seriously. Take care of these things, because these things matter to God. Decide to identify yourself as a servant everywhere you go.

(For the leader: Share a personal story on being challenged to be faithful in the little things.)

DISCUSS

- Do you see value in being faithful in the small things? Why or why not?
- Do you think there ever comes a time when you don't have to be faithful in the small things anymore?
- Is it difficult to stay committed to doing the small things? Why or why not?

Verse: Read Luke 16:11

This verse is talking about being faithful in everyday life. How do you do in environments where Jesus isn't talked about? Like with your family or at your school? How do you handle those? Character works in life; it's a kingdom principle. Do you gossip at school? Do you work hard? Do you help call people to be more than they are at school? God pays attention to that stuff. He says so right here in Luke 16. If you can't handle someone else's stuff, you shouldn't be given God's stuff.

(For the leader: Share a story in your life where you found yourself being tempted to behave or talk differently around people outside of faith depending on the environment. How did that experience affect you and your relationships?)

Verse: Read Luke 16:12

This verse discusses being faithful in following someone else. This is a really big deal. Oftentimes when we don't choose to be faithful in following someone else's vision and honoring their authority we may miss out on receiving our own vision for someone to follow. Most of the way that God honors us is as we serve someone who is already in authority. (For the leader: Give a personal example.)

DISCUSS

- Have you served anyone else's vision?
- Have you made it so that you surrender your dreams and desires so that someone else can succeed?
- Will you serve them in whatever capacity you can serve them?
It's not about you. It's not about your gifts or what you think you can do.

HOLY SPIRIT/ MINISTRY TIME

Take some time to pray over the group as a whole. Pray for God to meet them in their evaluation process and provide grace. Pray against any shame, but remind them that we get as much healing as we are willing to come to grips with. If we want to ignore things in our hearts, we get that much worth of healing. Remind students that nothing they bring up is new to God. He loves them right where they are right now.

APPLICATION

Find ways you can be faithful in the little things this week. In what ways can you go out of your way to serve your family? Your neighbors? I challenge you to do this in a way that doesn't look for praise and acknowledgment.

HOMEWORK EVALUATION

Do this work on your own, and then share with a small group!

1. In what ways have you been faithful to serve in little ways? In what places in your church have you been serving to this point?

2. What would your classmates, teachers, and/or coaches say about you? Take a minute this week to evaluate the following characteristics on a scale of 1–10:

Work Ethic

Are you on time? Do you work efficiently and purposefully?

Do you complete homework assignments on time?

Attitude

Do you create a positive environment?

Do your classmates appreciate and look up to you?

Teachability

Do you handle criticism well?

Do you seek evaluation and challenge?

DEALING WITH FAILURE

YOUTH LEADER SOUL CARE

Before jumping into this lesson, spend some time with God allowing him to minister to your heart in the areas where you have dealt with failure. As you teach this lesson, it may stir up feelings or memories in you. Take some time to meditate on Ephesians 1:7, "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us." Think about the riches of his grace that are lavished upon you, before you enter into leading this session.

LESSON PREP

Take some time to pray before jumping into this lesson. This can be an intense topic to talk about and can stir up a lot of conflicting emotions with your teens. Pray God will give you wisdom on how to navigate ministry time. Give your teens time to process and remind them that this lesson is not intended to inflict any guilt. Remind them that Jesus loves us so much, he wants us to be rid of all that holds us back from experiencing him.

LESSON

Verses: Read 1 Samuel 15:1–20

Verses 10–20 look at the issue of self-deception. Saul is given specific instructions to wipe out this town and told not to spare anything. What does Saul do? He saves the king and he saves the best animals. Saul doesn't obey, so he finds himself being confronted by Samuel—again. If you look at verses 10–13, Saul is completely deceiving himself. He has lost track of what God's commands are (read verse 13 again).

You can be so self-deceived that even when you are in blatant disobedience, you have no idea what's actually happening and how you are truly behaving. Saul has three different encounters where Samuel tries to wake him up to the truth, yet he doesn't wake up. Listen to Samuel's response (read verse 14). Do you hear that? Samuel is like, "Dude, I can hear the animals you were supposed to kill! What are you talking about?!"

Pause the lesson at this point and have each person answer the following questions privately, on paper.

- Is there anything hidden in your life that if it was brought to light it could negatively affect your influence?
- Is there any relationship in your life that would go against what you say you believe?
- Does your computer, smartphone, or tablet reveal anything of your nature that could be used to distort your identity?

Your responses to these questions are important to pay attention to because they are the secret things that follow us in the background. It's possible to be unaware of these things. Saul makes that clear. My prayer is that you would become awakened to these things. And please know this: There's no reason to feel shame as you think these things through. Simply respond to what God might reveal to you right now in this moment.

Verses: Read 1 Samuel 15:15–26

Saul's response is not really repentance. In fact, it looks a lot more like denial. God's response is, "Saul, that's enough. I can't let you continue to go on like this." God has confronted Saul, and Saul doesn't really respond. He's unwilling to take any responsibility. He has all kinds of excuses for his sin. God eventually pulls the plug on Saul's leadership. (Read verse 24–26 again.)

When you only confess after consequences are handed down, it is hard to tell if you are truly repentant. Are you responding to the consequences, or do you truly want to change your heart?

Here's some advice that's been given to me over the years: Tell on yourself all the time. If you choose to take this advice, make sure you are entrusting yourself to a healthy person, whether that's a youth pastor or small group leader, your mentor, or parent. If that person is trustworthy, they will do whatever it takes to walk you through whatever is going on.

HOLY SPIRIT/ MINISTRY TIME

I never want to get to this moment we find Saul in. I don't want to believe I'm too important or that the use of my giftings are more important than my character. That's not what's important at the end of the day. The core of who you are is that you are loved by God. When you don't operate out of that place, things can get really messy. There's no reason to let yourself get caught in something. Just come clean and tell the truth, even if your struggle has gone on for a long time.

Everything we have talked about in this material is all about the heart. It's all about what God's doing in you and through you. Trust your life to other people, and God will lift you up. He opposes the proud and gives grace to the humble. Every time he will give you grace. There is always grace. Don't mistake gifting for character, and don't think that because good things are happening in your life, everything is okay.

Allow some time for students to fill out their evaluation.

This is an evaluation that students can use to reflect on where they are in the areas of character. It presents an opportunity to address any weak areas. Feel free to edit the evaluation form. Some of it might be a bit intense for middle schoolers to answer. You can leave out portions that don't feel appropriate for your group and add in whatever might be helpful. Encourage students to share their responses with a leader in order to have someone speak into who they are and remind them of their identity.

HOMEWORK EVALUATION

Take some time to work on these on your own, and then share with a small group!

1. Who have been significant leaders in your life over the last few years? What would (or do) those leaders say about you in the following areas?

Confession

Do you tell on yourself before getting caught? Have you built confession into your life as a pattern?

Correction

Have you received correction and counsel and responded with repentance and humility? Are there any times that you have received counsel that you haven't listened or responded to?

2. What bad tendencies do you have when being tested?

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About the Author

Thomas McKellick

Thomas, is the Youth and Young Adults Pastor at the North Jersey Vineyard, working with students from 6-12th grade and young adults between the ages of 18 and 25. He is also the East Regional Coordinator for youth ministry in VineyardUSA. After high school, he studied at Vineyard College of Mission in Boise, ID with areas of focus on video production and church planting. Thomas worked on staff for over seven years at Pathway Vineyard in Lewiston, ME and served as the director of Heroic Leadership Institute, a 9 month discipleship school for young adults in the Vineyard Movement. One of his greatest passions is seeing young people learn how deeply God values them and embracing the fullness that He offers along their journey.